

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L LAGOS 7852

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PDEV, NI, SHUM
SUBJECT: LOCAL GOVERNMENT CORRUPTION: OBASANJO EXPRESSES
CONCERN

REF: LAGOS A-56

1. AMIDST INCREASING PRESS REPORTS AND
SPECULATION ABOUT MISBEHAVIOR AND CORRUPTION
IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT COUNCILS (LGC), HEAD OF
STATE OBASANJO HAS EXPRESSED THE CONCERN OF
THE FMG OVER THE PROBLEM. IN REMARKS TO LGC
OFFICIALS DURING HIS VISIT TO KANO STATE,
OBASANJO REPORTEDLY SAID THAT THE LGCS HAD
BECOME "A SOURCE OF ANGUISH TO THE STATE
GOVERNMENT AND THE PEOPLE THEY ARE SUPPOSED TO
SERVE." OBASANJO CONTINUED THAT IT WAS SAD
THAT THE LGCS HAVE "BEEN A GREAT DISAPPOINTMENT
BECAUSE THEY HAVE NOT PERFORMED THE WAY THEY
ARE SUPPOSED TO." ON NORTHERN LGCS, OBASANJO
SAID "REPORTS OF MALPRACTICES ABOUT AS BAD AS
THE ONES WE HAVE HEARD FROM ANYWHERE IN THE
COUNTRY HAVE BEEN RECEIVED."

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2. OBASANJO BLAMED THE PROBLEM ON
SELFISHNESS AND SAID THAT CHAIRMEN AND COUNCILLORS
WERE QUARRELING OVER THE DISTRIBUTION OF CON-
TRACTS TO THEIR NOMINEES. HE POINTED OUT THAT
THE FMG DID NOT EXPECT IRRESPONSIBILITY,
UNACCOUNTABILITY, FRAUD, MALPRACTICES AND
CORRUPTION. HE CONCLUDED "WE EXPECT SERVICE

TO THE COMMUNITY THAT ELECTED YOU."

3. OBASANJO'S REMARKS CAME IN THE MIDST OF AN INCREASING NUMBER OF REPORTS THAT ALL IS NOT WELL IN THE LGCS. FOR EXAMPLE, PLATEAU STATE GOVERNOR GROUP CAPTAIN DAN SULEIMAN ANNOUNCED LAST WEEK THAT SHENDAM LGC CHAIRMAN HAD BEEN REMOVED FROM OFFICE, ALL THE SUPERVISORY COUNCILLORS HAD BEEN DOWNGRADED, AND THE LGC SECRETARY HAD BEEN DEMOTED IN CIVIL SERVICE RANK AS A RESULT OF THE INVESTIGATION OF THE LGC'S ACTIVITIES.

4. SPECULATION ABOUT WHAT HAS GONE WRONG WITH SO MANY LGCS HAS BEEN A WEEKLY PRESS MOTIF. IN A JUNE 15 NEW NIGERIAN ARTICLE, ADESOLA ADEOGUN OF THE INSTITUTE OF ADMINISTRATION, ABU, ZARIA, SIAD THAT IN HIS VIEW IF "THE OPERATIONS AND MANAGEMENT OF COUNCILS IN NIGERIA TODAY SHOULD BE SUBJECTED TO SERIOUS SCRUTING, WELL OVER 90 PERCENT WOULD NOT STAND THE TEST."

5. ACCORDING TO ADEOGUN, THE LGC DEVELOPED THEIR BAD HABITS FROM THE MOMENT THEY BEGAN OPERATION IN 1976:

"COMMON SCENES SHORLY AFTER THE ELECTIONS
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AND INDUCTIONS OF COUNCILLORS, WERE THE FLEET OF MERCEDES BENZ (PRIOR TO ITS BAN) PEUGEOT AND TOYOTA CROWN AND OTHERS BELONGING TO VARIOUS LOCAL GOVERNMENT COUNCILS WITH OFFICIALS AND THEIR FEMALE COUNTERPARTS KGIRL FRIEND OR WHOEVER) CHAUFFEUR DRIVEN INTO THE VARIOUS CITY CENTERS. THE CENTER POINT OF THIS EPISODE IS THAT THESE COUNCILLORS' BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDE ARE INCONSISTENT WITH THE REVOLUTIONARY OUTLOOK OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORMS. THE MORAL OF THE STORY HERE IS THAT NO MATTER HOW GOOD A PLAN IS ON PAPER, PEOPLE'S ATTITUDE AND PRACTICAL INTERPRETATION OF SUCH PLAN INTO REALITY MATTERS A LOT; AND IN FACT IT IS THE SOULD OF ITS SUCCESS."

ADEOGUN EXPRESSES THE HOPE THAT THE PROBLEMS OF THE LGCS ARE TEETHING DIFFICULTIES WHICH WILL WORKK THEMSELVES OUT AND NOT A REFLECTION OF FUNDAMENTAL MALADIES IN NIGERIAN POLITICAL SOCIETY.

6. COMMENT: AN EMBASSY OFFICER RECENTLY DISCUSSED THE LGCS' PROBLEMS WITH TWO LG SECRETARIES, DENNIS MOHAMMED GWA OF THE MAKURDI LGC (BENUE STATE) AND LAWAN HABIB BASHIR OF THE BICHI LGC (KANO STATE) WHO BOTH RATHER RUEFULLY ADMITTED THAT THERE WERE "A LOT OF PROBLEMS" IN THE SYSTEM. ACCORDING TO GWA, THE DIDDLECULTIES ARISE PRIMARILY OVER THE POWER OF THE LGCS TO GIVE OUT CONTRAVTS FOR LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS SUCH AS ROADS AND PRIMARY SCHOOLS. AS MOST OF THE COUNCILLORS ARE AREA NOTABLES WITH CLOSE BUSINESS RELATIONSHIPS THROUGHOUT THE REGION, OPPORTUNITIES ARE RIFE FOR CONTRACT
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BROKERING WITH CONCOMITANT KICKBACKS. GWA SAID THAT IN HIS LGC THE COUNCIL EVEN WAITED UNTIL HE LEFT TOWN AND THEN CALLED MEETINGS TO HANDLE THE ALLOCATION OF CONTRACTS. THE STATE LOCAL GOVERNMENT MINISTRY FINALLY STEPPED IN TO PUT A STIP TO THE PRACTICE AND ANNULLED ALL LGC DECISIONS MADE IN GWA'S ABSENCE. NEITHER GWA NOR BASHIR WAS PARTICULARLY OPTIMISTIC THE SITUATION WOULD IMPROVE UNDER CIVILIAN RULE AND BOTH SAID THEY WANTED TO GET DIFFERENT JOBS IN THE CIVIL SERVICE BEFOR 1979.
WYMAN

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